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ABSTRACT

New information technologies, changing work force demographics, rising customer expectations, transnational companies, and cost pressures are altering traditional views of what constitutes a workplace and have given rise to a new trend: the mobile worker in the flexible workplace. Two factors promote acceptance of telework or telecommuting: (1) employee flexibility in workspace, time, and productivity; and (2) employer profit margins and cost savings. A mobile work force appeals to employers because it can save money typically spent on office space, computer equipment, travel time, and conflict resolution. Surveillance of teleworkers, however, is a major consideration offsetting these cost benefits. Employers must ensure that the monitoring of teleworkers does not result in invasion of privacy or in practices that are perceived as negative or resented by employees. Also of key importance is the need for employers to help "hoteling" employees cope with feelings of isolation and rootlessness triggered by separation from the onsite work environment. New mobile work arrangements creating the virtual workplace--telecommuting, telework centers, nonterritorial offices, and team space--are changing the way companies and workers do business with each other and with their respective clients. (An annotated bibliography that contains 21 references constitutes 75% of this document.) (MN)

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT NO. 10 1999

The Mobile Worker in the Flexible Workplace

New information technologies, changing work force demographics, rising customer expectations, transnational companies, and cost pressures are forcing companies to reconsider ideas of what the workplace is. New strategies such as telecommuting, telework centers, nonterritorial offices, and team space are creating the "virtual workplace." This Alert looks at the trends and issues regarding work in alternative environments such as the home.

Two factors promote acceptance of telework or telecommuting: employee flexibility in work space, time, and productivity and employer profit margins and cost savings. Savings in time and effort mean dollars earned or saved on each side. Workers are drawn to the flexibility afforded by working at home or from mobile locations. New technologies are making such flexibility increasingly possible. Groups of workers for whom travel represents an extensive part of their job descriptions may use the Internet for collaborative and community-building activities as well as for training, market review, and product tracking (Dyszel 1999). Parents who have child or elder care responsibilities may access their work online from home, allowing them to balance work and family life. These extended work options are appealing to many workers and are becoming more state of the art. Drawbacks appear to be the lack of one-on-one communication and team building that occurs through daily contact with coworkers.

A mobile work force appeals to employers as it can save money typically spent on office space, computer equipment, travel time, and conflict resolution. Surveillance of teleworkers, however, is a major consideration offsetting these cost benefits. For example, how can employers monitor the work of teleworkers when they are not on site? How can employers ensure that the at-home teleworkplace is protected from invasion by other, nonwork forces—e.g., children, household tasks, visitors, etc. Managers must take such issues into consideration before allowing an employee to enter into an alternative work environment (Schilling 1999).

The employer has to ensure that the monitoring of teleworkers does not result in invasion of privacy or practices that are perceived as negative or resented by the employee (Fairweather 1999). Field (1998) contends that "flexible home-based work arrangements succeed only if employers are comfortable assessing a worker's performance and commitment primarily by the results produced, not by the time spent on the job during 'normal' business hours" (p. 7).

Also of key importance is the need for employers to help "hoteling" employees cope with feelings of isolation and rootlessness triggered by separation from the onsite work environment (Duggy 1999). Too much open or team space at the work site can also cause stress as it ignores privacy issues. A guiding rule for team space is to keep it small, a practice that encourages communication between team members and the rest of the organization.

The new mobile work arrangements creating the virtual workplace—telecommuting, telework centers, nonterritorial offices, and team space—are changing the way companies and workers do business with each other and with their respective clients. Key elements to consider in these arrangements are flexibility in work time, space, and performance; cost-effective production of goods and services; worker satisfaction and learning through social interactions with others; and strategies for facilitating brainstorming, team work, problem-solving, and collaboration. The following resources offer additional information about mobile workers and employment.

Resources

"An Empirical Evaluation of the Impacts of Telecommuting on Intra-organizational Communication." *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management* 16, no. 1 (March 1999): 1-28.

Examined the effects of telework arrangements on intra-organizational communication, finding that with few exceptions part-time telework did not influence the quality of intra-organizational communication.

Anfuso, Dawn. "Experts Recommend Team-based Incentives and Stipends for Telecommuters." *Personnel Journal* 74, no. 1 (January 1995): 119.

Examines incentive programs offered to at-home workers. Noting that such incentives do not promote teamwork or reward quality improvement, recommendations are given to tie incentive pay to business issues that are critical to success.

Apgar, Mahlon, IV. " The Alternative Workplace: Changing Where and How People Work." *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. 3 (May-June 1998): 121-136. (EJ 563 596)

Discusses the alternative workplace, the combination of nontraditional work practices, settings, and locations that is beginning to supplement traditional offices. Looks at myths and realities, options, advantages and disadvantages, and implementation of alternative workplaces.

Becker, Franklin, and Tennessen, Carolyn M. *Social Connectivity in the Mobile Workplace. Workscape 21: The Ecology of New Ways of Working.* Ithaca, NY: International Workplace Studies Program, Cornell University, 1995. (ED 418 275)

Digital Equipment Corporation's virtual workplace strategy was initiated in its Newmarket, England office. Interviews conducted after this practice was initiated revealed that the organization was more pleased with this arrangement than the workers, who missed the socialization and face-to-face interactions.

Becker, Franklin; Rappaport, Andrew J.; Quinn, Kristen L.; and Sims, William R. *Telework Centers. An Evaluation of the North American and Japanese Experience. Workscape 21: The Ecology of New Ways of Working.* Ithaca, NY: College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, 1993. (ED 418 276)

A case study of 10 telework centers and 2 resort offices in the United States, Canada, and Japan shows that employee responses were very positive, indicating that telework centers enhanced their productivity. Japanese workers, however, experienced a greater sense of social isolation and difficulty in self-management. The goal of reduced fuel consumption and traffic congestion was realized.

"Building Team Relies on Project Extranet." *Building Design & Construction* 40, no. 9 (September 1999): 36.

Describes the creation of an online virtual office by builders of the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, noting that workers were able to access through the project's extranet over 4,500 blueprints and drawings, hundreds of photos, schedules and requests for information.

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"Death of the Executive Row." *Facilities Design & Management* 17, no. 11 (November 1998): 44-46.

Transformations of the physical workplace are explored, with distinctions being made between the norms and practices that have guided the "executive row" layout and the "team-space" environment plan. Gives examples of three organizations that have initiated new organizational designs and reexamined the process of organizational transformation.

Duffy, Daintry. "Cube Stakes." *CIO* 12, no. 13 (April 15, 1999): 66-72.

Emphasizes the need for investment in training to help mobile employees deal with feelings of isolation caused by such strategies as hoteling. Identifies an organization's need to help employees find creative ways of coping with changes caused by mobile work strategies.

Dyszel, Bill. "Virtual Intranet." *Success* 46, no. 2 (February 1999): 46-47.

Presents the benefits of subscribing to a Web-based virtual-office service and identifies two categories of services: business-collaboration services and community-building services.

"Even Executives Are Losing Their Offices." *HRMagazine* 43, no. 4 (March 1998): 77.

A "neighborhoods" approach to office arrangements is exemplified by the executive suites in Steelcase Inc.'s Grand Rapids, Michigan headquarters. Grouped by job function and responsibility, executives use individual cubicles and team space areas along with a central communications center.

Fairweather, N. Ben. "Surveillance in Employment: The Case of Teleworking." *Journal of Business Ethics* 22, no. 1 (October 1999): 39-49.

Ways of allowing managers to monitor teleworkers are presented, along with the drawbacks and employee resentments of policing methods.

Field, Linda. "A Little Leeway Goes a Long Way." *Nation's Business* 86, no. 11 (November 1998): 6.

Identifies five strategies for making flexible job arrangements work to advantage: an environment that encourages self-motivation, a relaxed approach to work that adheres to standards, continuous communication, enhanced performance expectations, and adopting a win-win mentality.

Guthrie, Ruth A., and Pick, James B. "Work Ethic Differences between Traditional and Telework Employees." *Journal of End User Computing* 10, nol. 4 (Fall 1998): 33-41.

Presents 18 ethical scenarios related to freedom of work ethic, workplace monitoring, compensation, work and family, and equity.

Hill, E. Jeffrey; Miller, Brent, C.; Weiner, Sara P.; and Colihan, Joe. "Influences of the Virtual Office on Aspects of Work and Work/Life Balance." *Personnel Psychology* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 667-683.

Studies the influences of working from a virtual offices—productivity, morale, flexibility, extended work hours—through comparisons of 157 IBM virtual office teleworkers and 89 traditional office workers. Qualitative findings for productivity, flexibility, and work/life balance were positive; those for morale, teamwork, and work hours were not.

Hudson, Marion E. "Hoteling: Offices a la Carte." *Office Systems* 16, no. 9 (September 1999): 28-34.

Introduces the concept of "hoteling"—the provision of a temporary work space for mobile workers, which is triggered by the need for workers who telecommute, to have a space to meet for concentrated work efforts or to engage in team work (brainstorming, comparing notes, etc.).

Huws, Ursula. *Teleworking: Guidelines for Good Practice*. Brighton, England: Institute for Employment Studies, University of Sussex, 1997. (ED 404 568)

This book provides practical guidelines for good practice in regard to teleworkers that recognize that teleworking is not a single category, but covers at least five distinct groups with different needs: multisite teleworking, tele-homeworking, freelance teleworking, mobile teleworking, and relocated back-offices.

Levin, Amanda. "'Virtual Agencies' Are Becoming a Reality." *National Underwriter* 103, no. 32 (August 9, 1999): 10-11.

Highlights the benefits of converting traditional offices to virtual ones: faster interactions, reduced inefficiencies, and increased earnings potential. Details a $6 million cost savings plus an annual savings of $3 million realized by Heritage Mutual after the company's offices went virtual.

Mandel, Michael J., and Gutner, Toddi. "Help Wanted: Mobileworker.com." *Business Week* no. 36-48 (September 27, 1999): 102.

Relates new technological changes to the evolution of smart and motivated U.S. workers, workers who have increasingly new opportunities for mobility.

McCarthy, Patrick. "Traditional Labor Laws Apply to the Non-traditional Office." *Personnel Journal* 73, no. 9 (September 1994): 75.

Discusses the issue of labor laws regarding health and safety compliance as well as third-party injury claims. Offers guidelines to reduce unwarranted wage and hour claims by at-home workers.

Schilling, Stephen L. "The Basics of Successful Telework Network." *HR Focus* 76, no. 6 (June 1999): 9-10.

Describes the challenge managers face to learn new ways to manage staff, technology, and real estate as a result of telecommuting employees.

Stanworth, Celia. "Telework and the Information Age." *New Technology, Work and Employment* 13, no. 1(March 1998): 51-62. (EJ 566 015)

Explores the role of new technology in the information age as a strategy for avoiding economic deterioration, higher unemployment, and industrial strife in Britain. It explores ways in which the new technologies and telework options are attractive for management and identifies the stresses that surface as a result of such changes.

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